

What Millennial Clients Want from Your Veterinary Clinic

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What you'll learn:

- Take a consultative approach because millennials love effective teachers
- Be forward-looking, mapping out healthcare plans for pets
- Bond with them, keeping notes on hobbies, interests and family
- Communicate in millennials' preferred platforms of apps, texts, social media and mobile-friendly websites
- Implement loyalty and frequent visitor programs
- Participate in community and charity events that show you give back to animal causes

Millennials are now the primary pet-owning demographic at 35% of U.S. pet owners compared to Baby Boomers' 32%, the American Pet Products Association (APPA) reports.¹ Veterinary care spending increased 3.4% to \$15.95 billion in 2016. APPA predicts a 4.2% increase in veterinary care spending in 2017. Pet supplies and over-the-counter medications increased 3% to \$14.71 billion. More than half the world's population is younger than 30. This demographic grew up with the Internet and smartphones.

Do you know millennials?

- Millennials check their smartphones 43 times per day.²
- 65% say losing their phones or computers would have greater negative impact on their daily routine than losing their cars.³
- 77% of millennials participate in loyalty reward programs.³
- Millennials are more engaged in activities like rating products and services than older generations.³
- Millennials average 250 Facebook friends and 90% are on social networks.⁴
- To keep track of their pets, 69% of millennials would use technology such as baby monitors or apps compared to 33% of boomers.⁴
- Millennials like to try the latest technology and new products and services.⁵
- Millennials spend more on veterinary care and pet services compared to other generations.⁵
- The millennial generation will add 2.6 million pet owners between now and 2020.⁶

Take a consultative approach because millennials love effective teachers

	Baby Boomers	Generation X	Millennials ⁷
Age	51 to 69	35 to 50	18 to 34
# of U.S. population	74.9 million	65.8 million	75.4 million

Each generation has engagement preferences based on age and life experiences.⁸ Common values for all generations are a trusted doctor-client relationship, involvement in healthcare decisions and high-quality, easy-to-understand health information from their doctors, preferably in digital format.⁹

Generational expert Cam Marston of Generational Insights presented findings to Banfield Pet Hospitals so veterinary teams could understand and connect with this next generation of pet owners.¹⁰ Be consultative in your approach, answering millennials' questions. Millennials define expertise as the ability to teach well. Guide millennials through healthcare decisions, educating and explaining along the way.

Let's say you advise a pet owner to give subcutaneous fluids to her cat at home to treat its chronic kidney disease. Tell the client, *"Let's give your cat fluids together today so you will know how to do it at home. You're welcome to record a video on your smartphone for reference. I will text you a link to our hospital's YouTube video on how to give fluids. Giving your cat fluids three times per week will keep her hydrated and let us better manage her kidney disease together."*

Use multiple teaching tools. In addition to generational preferences, people have different learning styles.¹¹ Use models, websites, dry-erase boards, x-rays, handouts, exam report cards, and videos.

- **65% are visual learners.** They comprehend best when shown an image, model or graphic that demonstrates the problem or treatment. Visual learners may take notes, take photos or videos on smartphones or draw a picture to understand a concept.
- **20% to 25% are auditory learners.** They learn information from lecture or discussion. This statistic is important because if you use words alone, you may not be communicating with 75% of your audience.
- **10% to 15% are tactical learners.** "Doers" must perform tasks before they understand them. Use interactive lessons when showing clients how to clean ears, trim nails, administer subcutaneous fluids, and give medications.

Be forward-looking, mapping out healthcare plans for pets

Set expectations for follow-up care. A client visits today for her dog's checkup. The veterinarian diagnoses an ear infection and wants to examine the patient again in two weeks. Both the doctor and receptionist need to echo expectations for follow-up care.

After explaining the diagnosis and treatment in the exam room, the veterinarian would say, *"I need to see your dog again in two weeks for a medical progress exam, which will be <date>. I will examine your dog again to make sure the ear infection has healed. Follow-up care is important because ear infections can be painful and return. The receptionist will schedule the follow-up exam on <date> during checkout."*

Say "medical progress exam" instead of the wiggle word of "recheck." From a pet owner's perspective, "recheck" may sound free and optional. Schedule the follow-up exam before collecting payment for today's services. An appointment reminder will print on today's receipt. The receptionist would say, *"Dr. <Name> needs to see your dog in two weeks for a progress exam for his ear infection. Let's schedule his exam first, and then I'll get you checked out for today's services. Two weeks from today would be <date>. Does this same time, 9 a.m., work for you?"*

Aim for "same day, same time, same doctor." If the client is here at 9 a.m. on a Thursday, she can likely visit again at a similar time and day. Book the appointment with the same veterinarian, ensuring continuity of care and efficient use of exam time.

If the client won't commit, enter a reminder in your practice-management software to follow up one week before care is due. Text the client, "Max needs a follow-up exam for his ear infection. Do you prefer 9 a.m. Thursday or 2 p.m. Friday?" You've turned the 5-minute phone conversation into a 10-second text and contacted the millennial client using her preferred communication method.

Implement forward booking. Six out of 10 pet owners will forward book their pets' checkups, an American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) State of the Industry report found.¹² Lead clients to schedule: *"Just as your dentist has you schedule your next appointment at checkout, we do the same so we can proactively manage your pet's health. Dr. <Name> could see your pet at 10 a.m. on Wednesday, Dec. 27 or 3 p.m. on Friday, Dec. 29. Which do you prefer?"*

Guide pet owners to book future exams with the two-yes-options technique. The first choice is the same day of the week and time as today's appointment. The second choice is a different day of the week and time of day (morning vs. afternoon).

When a procrastinator won't book, be persistent. Say, *"I understand you don't know your schedule 12 months from today. Let's book your pet's next checkup for this same day and time next year. We will confirm two weeks before the exam, so if you need to change the appointment it will be easy. By scheduling today, you will get your first choice of doctor, day and time. Your appointment reminder for 10 a.m., Wednesday, Dec. 27 will print on today's receipt."*

Implement disease-management exams. Forward booking is especially important for patients with chronic health conditions such as cardiomyopathy, hyperthyroidism, kidney disease and diabetes. Once you diagnose a pet with a chronic condition, switch the patient from a preventive exam to a disease-management exam code. The disease-management exam reminds quarterly or at the interval the veterinarian determines. Scheduled follow-up care will let the veterinarian provide optimal disease management. Clients also will appreciate that the veterinarian has spread out the cost of care.

My cat, Caymus, has cardiomyopathy and gets cardiac workups every six months. When forward booking chronic conditions, use benefit statements such as: *"Let's schedule Caymus' next cardiac workup, which will be due in six months. We want to successfully manage his cardiomyopathy. Six months from today would be Dec. 14. Dr. <Name> could see your kitty at 10 a.m. on Thursday, Dec. 14 or 3 p.m. on Friday, Dec. 15. Which do you prefer?"*

Offer preventive care plans. Help millennials budget for routine veterinary care. Millennials' median salary is \$39,700.³ The AAHA State of the Industry Report found 80% of pet owners are interested in preventive care plans.¹² Plans with monthly payments could help more clients accept optimal care. Design plans that reflect your standards of care. AAHA-AVMA offers preventive care guidelines at www.aaha.org/professional/resources/preventive_healthcare.aspx. Offer plans with an add-on dental procedure. Review and update the services and fees in plans annually. Download my proceedings on preventive care plans from the 2016 AAHA Convention at www.csvets.com/AAHA.

Research from Banfield Pet Hospitals, a leader in plans with more than 1.4 million pets enrolled, indicates patient visits are typically double for plan users. At Banfield, dog owners with plans average three visits annually while cats visit four times per year.¹³

Third-party providers who provide financing for preventive care plans include:

- Avimark Wellness, www.avimark.net
- Extend Credit Financing, www.extendcredit.com
- IDEXX Petly Plans, www.petlyplans.com
- PaymentBanc Financing, www.paymentbanc.com
- Vet Billing, www.vetbilling.com

Follow the model in the pet insurance industry and aim for monthly payments of \$30 to \$50. Preventive care plans may help eliminate "Do you want?" negotiations in exam rooms.

Bond with millennials, keeping notes on hobbies, interests and family

Keep "relationship management" notes. Just as sales professionals use customer relationship management (CRM) software to track leads, sales and conversation notes, your veterinary team can create its own CRM notes. Keep notes about hobbies, vacations, social causes, etc. Keep these personal observations separate from the legal medical record.

Personalize exam rooms. In addition to your veterinary degree, post photos of your pets, family and team outings. Use large canvas prints as well as digital photo frames. Letting clients see your hobbies and pets will help you identify common interests and engage in small talk that leads to trusting relationships. A client may see pictures of your Boxer—and she's here today with her new Boxer puppy. You have an instant connection!

Communicate with millennials through apps, texts, social media and mobile-friendly websites

Get inside millennials' inner circles. Text is the preferred communication method of millennials, and other generations want texts, too.¹⁴ Look at your smartphone and see who texts you—friends, family, co-workers and people who you know and trust. Your veterinary hospital needs to be part of this inner circle. Texts have a 99% open rate and 95% of messages get read within 3 minutes of being sent.¹⁴

Two-way texts could reduce phone calls while improving productivity. Graduate beyond texts for appointment confirmations and medication dosing reminders. Use direct and automated texts for:

- Medication refill requests
- Prescriptions and diets ready for pickup
- Left you voicemail, please listen and call <employee name> at 555-555-5555
- Late arriving clients
- Get clients who missed appointments to reschedule
- Driving directions to new clients on day of appointment
- How-to video links
- Weather closure
- Client experience survey
- Extended hours now available/coming soon
- Lab results ready, please call
- Collections

Use services that allow two-way texting such as:

- Dialog Health, www.dialoghealth.com/animalhealth
- VitusVet, <http://content.vitusvet.com/request-a-demo-of-the-vitusvet-vet-app-csvets>
- Zipwhip, <https://blog.zipwhip.com/2016/11/08/special-20-off-for-veterinarians/>

Turn calls into texts to improve client experiences. Did you know 70% of business callers get placed on hold? Studies show that after holding 1 minute, 55 seconds, most callers hang up annoyed and 34% won't call back. The average person will spend 1.2 years on hold during a lifetime.¹⁵

Use texts for prescription refills. Think of the top 10 tasks that suck time from your team. Depending on your hospital's size, receptionists may get 30 to 50 calls for prescription refills each day. Could 10-minute phone conversations for refills be converted into 10-second texts? Turn more than 8 hours of phone conversations into 8 minutes of texting.

My cat, Caymus, takes benazepril daily. I refill his medication every three months. When you dispense his next prescription, create a refill reminder for 11 weeks, when one week of doses would remain. A text would be sent at Week 11, one week before medication runs out. Instead of a 10-minute phone call, which the client usually initiates, here's the 10-second text conversation:

Example of direct text for refill needed:

YourClinic: Do you want us to refill Caymus' benazepril? Reply Y or N.

Wendy Myers: Y

YourClinic: Thank you for requesting a refill. We will text you when it's ready.

Example of direct text for refill ready:

YourClinic: Your medication for Caymus is ready for pickup. We are open until 6 p.m. today.

Wendy Myers: Thanks! See you at 5:30.

Zipwhip lets you use your existing business phone number to send and receive texts. At Blue Sky Animal Clinic in Loveland, Colorado, clients text refill requests to the clinic's main phone number. Employees reply when messages pop up on the desktop screen.

Text clients to follow-up on discharged patients. Used by Mayo Clinic, hospitals and physicians, Dialog Health offers texting services for veterinary hospitals. In addition to confirmation texts, you can create series of automated text messages, broadcast texts about extended hours or weather closures, employee-only notices, and more. Brandon Daniell, president of Dialog Health's veterinary division, began focusing on animal health after poor follow up from his veterinarian for his dog's anterior cruciate ligament surgery. Now veterinarians could design automated serial texts such as "Remember to limit Cadet's activity during the first 6 weeks after surgery. Short leash walks only," "Is Cadet taking his pain medication? Reply Y or N," and "We will see Cadet at 4 p.m. Tuesday for suture removal." Campaigns should "notify, educate, support and steer" pet owners, Daniell says.

Reduce telephone tag. If the veterinarian calls and gets the client's voicemail, send a text such as "Dr. Smith left you a voicemail about Cadet. Please listen, and then call 555-555-5555. Dr. Smith is here until 7 p.m."

Be mobile-friendly. Millennials have the highest mobile usage of all generations, with 97% using mobile devices to consume digital content.¹⁶ Your hospital website must look good on mobile. Ask your web designer to ensure your website is easy to navigate on smartphones and tablets. Millennials are used to researching, ordering and booking on mobile devices.

Offer online scheduling. Postcards are becoming obsolete and expensive. Your hospital risks getting lost in a sea of junk mail, and then the pet owner must remember to call you (and be placed on hold) to schedule an appointment. Turn the hassle and multi-step process into a few clicks. Amazon and Uber don't make you call. Forgetful clients may call you after-hours, leave a message, and the cycle begins again.

Have an app for your clinic. In the VitusVet app, most appointment requests are sent between 8 p.m. and 7 a.m. The busiest time for appointment and refill requests is at 5 a.m., when your hospital may be closed.¹⁷ When people are on their smartphones, they spend 70% of their time in apps.¹⁷

What do pet owners want in a veterinary clinic's app? A survey of 610 dog and cat owners found:¹⁸

- 73% check clinic hours
- 69% make appointments
- 69% use veterinarian's loyalty program
- 57% look at their pets' medical records
- 53% search for veterinary articles and blogs
- 42% order medication

Half of respondents said they preferred an app over a phone call to make appointments.¹⁸ For a list of app providers, visit <http://marketplace.dvm360.com/products/apps>.

Use text and email together. Cut check-in time in half when you set expectations before the day of surgical and dental procedures. Text the client, "See you tomorrow at 8 a.m. for Cadet's surgical admission. No food after 10 p.m. Water is OK. We emailed surgical forms to <email>. Reply with questions." The text prompts the client to check his email, where you can provide detailed fasting instructions and attach consent forms and treatment plans.

Your email message might say, "We will see <pet name> for surgery tomorrow at <Your Veterinary Hospital>. Please withhold food after ___ p.m. tonight. Water is OK to drink to prevent dehydration. Your surgical admission begins at 8 a.m. with a nurse, who will spend 15 minutes reviewing the consent form, answering your questions, and getting phone numbers where we can reach you the day of the procedure.

I've attached your treatment plan and anesthesia consent forms. To speed your admission, please bring these signed forms with you, or we are happy to answer questions during check-in. Please allow at least 15 minutes for <pet name>'s admission to our hospital. If you have questions, call or text 555-555-5555."

Send push notifications through apps. Text and picture messaging through an app can stop frustrating and time-sucking telephone tag. VitusVet creates apps branded to practices with reminders and confirmations, text and picture messaging, target marketing, and appointment and refill requests.

Engage with millennials on social media

Millennials love being social—90% are on social networks and 91% check-in on Facebook. Millennials average 250 Facebook friends compared to 74 friends for Boomers. Among millennials who have a social media accounts for their pets, 66% are on Facebook, 38% are on Twitter and 34% are on Instagram.⁴ Facebook reaches all generations, used by 64% of American adults age 50 to 64 and 56% over age 65.¹⁹

Encourage check-ins. Just as pets only get spayed or neutered once in their lifetimes, Facebook users can only Like your page one time. For ongoing activity, encourage clients to check-in on Facebook each time they visit your hospital. More than 934 million use the Facebook app on mobile devices.¹⁹ On smartphones, clients can tap "check-in" so their friends see they're at your animal hospital. Clients can add descriptions of what they're doing and photos. When they check-in, the post will appear in their friends' News Feeds, so they're advertising your business for free. To promote check-ins, display a counter sign: "Check-in on Facebook now, and we'll thank you with 10% off treats or pet food today." Post on Facebook: "Visit our veterinary hospital this week and check-in on Facebook. We'll thank you with a complimentary pedicure for your pet." To see who has checked in, have a Page Administrator go to your Insights page or have clients show you their check-in posts on their phones.

Post patient photos and selfies with owners. Ask clients, "May we post your pet's picture on Facebook to welcome him as a new patient?" Create an album labeled "New Best Friends."

You need legal permission to post information about clients' pets. Most pet owners will be thrilled and say yes. Use the term "social media" rather than stating which sites so you have flexibility about where to post. Include your social media request on new client, anesthesia, grooming and boarding forms.

Sample social media permission form: I grant <Your Veterinary Hospital> permission to post my pet's picture, story and medical information on social media.

Signature of owner or responsible party

Date

Millennials are moving from Facebook to Snapchat and Instagram. Targeting millennials means you must be an early adopter of new platforms. If millennials start flocking to a new social network, join them now rather than waiting to see how big the social network will grow. Instagram has more than 500 million users and Snapchat reaches 41% of 18 to 34 year olds.¹⁶ Snapchat isn't just about cute photo filters or edited videos. It's about snapping a moment and immediately sharing it.

Post YouTube videos. Nipping at Facebook's heels, the second largest social network is YouTube. YouTube has more than 1 billion users. The average viewing session is 40 minutes on mobile devices.²⁰

Create your hospital's own YouTube channel, which is free. When uploading videos, complete the "Settings and Info" sections. This lets you list keywords in the "Tags" section and select the appropriate category. Choose the "Pets and Animals" category, which is one of YouTube's most popular. Give the video an accurate title and description to help people discover it. Put links to your YouTube videos on your hospital's website, Facebook page and other social networks. Keep videos short, targeting 30 seconds to 2 minutes. Short clips will generate the most traffic. Here are easy videos to get started:

- **Take a tour.** Most pet owners have never seen the working zones of your hospital. They typically see the lobby, exam room and maybe your client bathroom. Record a 5-minute video of an employee giving a walking tour of your hospital, from the front desk through exam rooms and into the treatment area. Shoot your video tour while the hospital is open so viewers see your team in action.
- **Teach with how-to videos.** Show clients how to brush pets' teeth, clean ears, give pills, trim nails, administer subcutaneous fluids, how to use pet portals on your website, and how to text your clinic.
- **Showcase procedures and diagnostics.** Narrate steps while taking dental x-rays and then have a doctor describe findings. Show what ear mites look like under the microscope. Make a video of a nurse performing preanesthetic testing. Share a video of a laser therapy session. Think of equipment you frequently use and show how it improves patient care.

Implement loyalty and frequent visitor programs

Loyalty and reward programs can make clients feel appreciated, improve compliance for patient care and grow clinic revenue. Here are types of loyalty programs:

- **Punch card:** Stamps or punches are earned and rewards are granted when the card is full. My nail salon has a punch card that gives me \$15 credit towards services once 10 punches are completed. Employees know my name and encourage me to forward book.
- **Points:** Users accrue points that may be redeemed for cash back or free items. At Starbucks, you earn points for each coffee purchase and redeem points for free coffee. An app tracks rewards.
- **Membership:** These pay-to-play programs charge a fee to participate. Rewards are VIP services such as Amazon Prime's free shipping.

Animal Clinic Del Rancho in Scottsdale, AZ rewards clients through its free app (<http://animalclinicdelrancho.com/our-app-and-loyalty-program/>). For every \$100 spent, clients get a digital stamp, with 16 stamps earning a \$100 credit towards a future visit. Rewards never expire. Eastern Animal Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland, has a "belly rub" loyalty program where clients earn points they can exchange for products, boarding, exams or even experiencing a career day with a veterinarian (www.easternanimalhospital.com/belly-rewards-program/).

Companies offering client loyalty programs include:

- MBF Loyalty, www.mbfloyalty.com
- My Vet Perks, www.myvetperks.com
- Rethink Veterinary Solutions, <http://rethinkvetsolutions.com>

Participate in community and charity events that show you give back to animal causes

Support animal charities. For one month, Bay Glen Animal Hospital in Houston, Texas asked Facebook followers to tell their friends to Like its page. Each Like was rewarded with a \$1 donation to the local animal shelter. They raised \$220 in 30 days—a win-win for the practice and adoptable pets. Set a budget and tell people your maximum contribution amount. Fort Caroline Animal Clinic in Jacksonville, Florida sponsored a spring pet food drive and set a goal to beat last year's 88 pounds of food for a local shelter.

List community events on your hospital's website. Let clients engage with you in the community. Share photos and blogs about your activities. The Village Vets, which has three locations in Georgia, lists pet rescue organizations on its website along with donations to its good Samaritan fund (www.thevillagevets.com).

Share volunteer work. The Village Vets' doctors also volunteer for Project Samana, which brings veterinary care and educational programs to poor regions of Latin America and the Caribbean

(www.thevillagevets.com/project-samana/about-project-samana). A blog describes a recent trip to the Dominican Republic to perform 126 small animal surgeries and dental procedures.

Which goals will you implement from today's training?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

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Helpful resources	Link
Article: 13 ways to use texting for your veterinary hospital	www.csvets.com/news/
Article: Forward book every patient's next preventive care exam	www.csvets.com/news/
Article: Postcards are out, digital is in	www.csvets.com/news/
Article: Stop clients' bad habits of emergency refills	www.csvets.com/news/
Videos: Communication Solutions for Veterinarians' YouTube channel with video tips	www.youtube.com/csvets
Webinar: Creating the 5-star experience in the exam room	www.csvets.com/cart/webinars/creating-the-5-star-experience-in-the-exam-room/
Webinar: How to prevent client complaints and bad reviews	www.csvets.com/cart/client-service/how-to-prevent-client-complaints-and-bad-reviews/
Webinar: Managing bad clients: Google-seekers, discount divas and obnoxious smartphone users	www.csvets.com/cart/webinars/managing-bad-clients-google-seekers-discount-divas-and-obnoxious-smartphone-users/
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